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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3162

INFO RUEHXQ/EU MEM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 5979

RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5173

RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1647

RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9852

RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1719

RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3573

RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0567

RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1005

RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3260

RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 0964

RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0588

RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 2814

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0477

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000374

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FOR FRC LAMBERT

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TAGS: PGOV PREL VE

SUBJECT: CHAVEZ BASHES BLAIR

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARK A. WELLS FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez launched into one of his customary tirades on February 8 after British Prime Minister Tony Blair offered measured criticism of his government. Chavez' diatribe against Blair is the latest example of Chavez' increasing tendency to provoke leaders in the international community other than President Bush. It also shows how extraordinarily thin-skinned Mr. Chavez is. Chavez risks isolating his international partners further as he becomes frustrated with their unwillingness to fall in line behind his ideological leadership. End Summary.

¶2. (U) During parliamentary question time on February 8, British Prime Minister Tony Blair called for Venezuela to abide by the rules of the international community. Blair added "with the utmost respect for the President of Venezuela" that he would like to see true democracy in Cuba. Later that evening, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez blasted Blair for "attacking" him, calling Blair "Bush-Hitler's main ally" and "the pawn of the empire." Chavez questioned Blair's authority to criticize him, claiming he and President Bush had abused the people of Iraq. "Don't be shameless and immoral," Chavez lectured. He taunted Blair, asking if he thought Britain still had its own empire. Finally, he said he would have to look for a nickname for Blair like he had for President Bush. (Note: Chavez calls President Bush "Mr. Danger," a reference to a venal American character in a novel by mid-20th century Venezuelan novelist and former President Romulo Gallegos.)

Hands Off Argentina

¶3. (U) During his speech, Chavez said he had received a

call from Argentine President Nestor Kirchner expressing his solidarity with Chavez after Defense Secretary Rumsfeld remarked February 2 that Hitler, like Chavez, had been elected democratically. Chavez called Secretary Rumsfeld "the warlord." On February 9, Chavez demanded that the United Kingdom surrender the Falkland Islands to Argentina.

The Bully of the Western Hemisphere

¶4. (C) President Bush has been Chavez' principal target, but his attacks against other foreign leaders have been steadily intensifying:

-- January 2006. Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo temporarily withdraws his ambassador from Venezuela after Chavez publicly praises Peruvian presidential candidate Ollanta Humala during Humala's visit to Venezuela.

-- November 2005. Mexican President Vicente Fox recalls his ambassador to Venezuela when Chavez calls Fox a U.S. "lapdog" for supporting the Free Trade Area of the Americas.

-- April 2005. Ousted Ecuadorian President Lucio Gutierrez claims Chavez, who supports radical anti-government groups in the country, tried to overthrow him.

-- January 2005. Chavez withdraws his ambassador from Colombia after Colombian officials have senior FARC official Rodrigo Granda smuggled out of Venezuela. Venezuela patches matters up with Colombia weeks later, blaming the quarrel on a U.S. conspiracy.

CARACAS 00000374 002 OF 002

-- August 2004. Chavez recalls his ambassador from Panama for a few days after outgoing President Mireya Moscoso pardons four anti-Castro Cubans accused of plotting terrorist acts.

-- November 2003. Chilean President Ricardo Lagos recalls his ambassador from Caracas after Chavez says he hopes one day to go swimming at a Bolivian beach.

Comment

¶5. (C) Chavez' thin-skinned megalomania sometimes gets the better of him. He fancies himself the leader of an anti-U.S. crusade and becomes visibly frustrated when he learns that the hemisphere he wants to "integrate" under his Bolivarian revolution does not always share his goals. He may be in for a bigger surprise if he ever realizes that many of his international partners--including Russia and China--are more interested in his cash than his ideology. He risks isolating his counterparts further as he circles his wagons around states like Iran, Cuba, and Syria.

BROWNFIELD